

Running between those mills

1.

Hot and hell, my grandmother would tell me. Hot and hell. She called me a flower, a barefoot flower, but it wasn't long till I was working under the smoke and heat. We always lived in the dale. It was hard in the dale, but home.

2.

I was used to life here, I spose. It had been like this for me for a long time, but my mother knew it different. She told me of what it was like in the mill, the shrieks when the newer machines got brought in. Mank and maffin in those mills, she said. Life got faster and noisier, she said. People came from all over. It's happening again now that the men have gone. We got women coming from all over to help out with the uniforms in the mills. They come from the coast a lot of them, contracts up at the end of the war.

3.

He writes me, you know. He calls me flower too, and Ann. He says he's fine. He says it's all alright, part from the flies and the smell. It's a noisy business. He says the weather is simply awful, raining day after sodding day. He says the snow was gone a month back, but now he's dreaming of home in the springtime. He says he knows what it's like down by the river this time of year. There's a calm spot we like way from the mill. He'll be glad of a few lines when I have time, to hear the latest about life here. Well darling I don't know much more to say, so will close with fondest love, Jack.

4.

Next day I sat with the other women from the mill and we talked about our letters. We laughed at some as they mentioned the things they got up to when the shells weren't falling. We were happy to have each other at the mill. A lot of the newer women here are now spinning the yarns, jobs only men used to do. Now we do all the work in the mill.

5.

Sometimes I can't quite decide if things are changing for us here in the valley. Things are changing, but a lot of it was already here and a lot of it will go back to the way it was before. Not glamorous nor new this work you're doing, my grandmother says. She sits there rocking to and fro.